

“Drug Prevention Programs and the Fiscal Year 2006 Drug Control Budget:
Is the Federal Government Neglecting Illegal Drug Use Prevention?”
Government Reform Committee
Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources Subcommittee
Written Testimony of Ashley Izadpanah
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Good afternoon,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Ashley Izadpanah and I am a junior at Robinson High School in Fairfax, Virginia.

When I was in the seventh grade, I joined the Safe and Drug Free Youth Council as a representative for the Robinson Community Coalition. I wanted the chance to help make a difference in the way my community responded to the issues surrounding teens: drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. Along with the Robinson Community Coalition, Robinson also offers a program called Power Team, a group of students who aim to lead drug-free lives and spread anti-drug message.

During my involvement with the Safe and Drug Free Youth Council, I have done just that. I have joined together with other concerned students locally, across the Commonwealth of Virginia, and across the nation to gain knowledge, offering opinions and speaking out in an effort to spread the message of health and safety to youth and their families.

When young people talk, young people listen. Often times, when young people talk, parents listen. One of the projects I am very proud to have participated in was the development of a series of Public Service Announcements (PSA's) on “Drug Abuse” that airs on Cox Communications television stations. The clips are geared towards informing parents about issues their children might be having in their schools or communities. People who don't know me have stopped to ask me if that was me they saw in the PSA. Hopefully, their parents were watching too. The fact that I have had random people from school and even the grocery store talk to me about the PSA makes me feel that the anti-drug message is spreading effectively in my community.

Another project I have participated in as a member of the Safe and Drug Free Youth Council is the production of anti-drug posters. These will be all over the walls of Northern Virginia schools and will serve as a constant reminder of the importance of drug awareness.

Youth Against Drug Abuse and Prevention Project (YADAPP) is a weeklong, student-run leadership conference that includes students from all over Virginia who talk about problems they see in their school and community regarding drug and alcohol abuse. During the camp a primary focus is enforcing leadership qualities within each participant (so we return home with the confidence and knowledge to be leaders within our communities).

I am so excited to have the opportunity to attend YADAPP because it has impacted my life in so many ways. As a student, I have seen that when students are placed in a positive, drug-free environment, it strengthens our desire to remain drug-free and re-enforces our decision to spread that message. Last summer I attended YADAPP as a participant and I have been chosen to attend YADAPP again this summer as a Youth Leader. This would not have been possible if programs like the Safe and Drug Free Youth Council did not exist.

The Safe and Drug Free Youth Council adult sponsors provide us with the opportunity to be heard on the issues that matter to the youth of today. They guide us and help us to make a difference in the way our community makes decisions in not only today's, but also tomorrow's uncertain world.

I have two younger brothers, ages 5 and 12, who will benefit from my involvement in the Safe and Drug Free Youth Council. I take the experiences, leadership skills, and the confidence I find at council and practice them on my family, neighbors and peers at school. This program has not only helped me stay safe and drug free, but it has also impacted the lives of countless others across the United States. As I move on to college, I hope to stay involved with the issues important to today's youth.

However, as we are all aware, the budget for the Anti-Drug efforts has been dramatically reduced. When I first heard of this cut I could not get over the fact that the government is willing to take money away from an effort that aims towards the wellbeing of today's youth, my generation. Today's youth make up tomorrow's America and without anti-drug programs to help teens to choose correct paths, I fear for the future's outcome. To take money away from those whose actions are easily influenced by the media and peers is just asking for continued drug use by today's youth.

The self-respect, self-esteem, confidence and knowledge gained through the experiences provided by programs like the Safe and Drug Free Youth Council help young people and their families make wise decisions that can impact them for a life time.

In closing, I would like to say that even though the government is willing to reduce its investment in anti-drug efforts, it's safe to assume that drug dealers will not cut back on their efforts and will continue to invest in their corrupting activities.

I urge you to re-think reducing the budget for the wellbeing of today's youth and to continue to support programs like the Safe and Drug Free Youth Council.

Thank you.